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## THE "TWIN SISTERS" CANNON, 1836-1865

E. W. WINKLER

Of the objects associated in the popular mind with the Texan Revolution, the "Twin Sisters" cannon and the Lone Star flag hold first place. They symbolize in a general way the triumph of liberty. Both have been talked and written about a good deal; first, during the exciting period of secession in 1861, and later, beginning with the revival of interest in the early history of Texas about 1876. The history and evolution of the Texas flag have been well told by Mrs. Adèle B. Looscan in *A Comprehensive History of Texas* (I, 693-99). The whereabouts of the "Twin Sisters" is still a favorite subject for speculation.

The *Cincinnati Evening Post* published a report of a meeting of the friends of Texas held in that city on November 17, 1835, from which the following data are obtained. Nicholas Clopper presided. "Edward Woodruff . . . gave some very interesting reasons upon the propriety of cheering on the Texeans in their struggle for Liberty. After Mr. Woodruff had closed, there were many and repeated calls for Robert T. Lyttle, Esq. . . . Mr. Lyttle offered the following resolutions, prefaced by some most thrilling and eloquent appeals in the cause of human liberty. He was repeatedly and enthusiastically cheered by one of the largest meetings held in our city for some time. The resolutions were unanimously adopted."

*Resolved* that this meeting cooperate in sentiment and feeling with the independent citizens of Texas, in their manly efforts now making in that Territory, by the late citizens of the United States, in maintaining their rights and resisting the aggressions upon them by an unprincipled usurper.

That as American citizens, we can do no less than encourage the *Spirit of Freedom*, wherever or by whatever people it may be displayed.

That the violation of the natural and conventional rights of our friends and brethren in Texas is regarded by this meeting with abhorrence and just indignation, and that they do commend in this instance the measures of resistance that have been resorted to and confidently hope and believe that as sons of the United

[States of] America, the lessons of their fathers will not be lost on their descendants.

That, as in the case of the patriotic Greeks, the South Americans and the Poles, we have a right to cheer them by our sympathies, and to aid them in the supplies of clothes and provisions.

That we approve of and recommend to the citizen of this meeting a plan by which the citizens of Texas shall be supplied through their agent, Mr. Smith, by our contributions, with such an amount of *hollow ware* as he may deem sufficient, to contain *other provisions*, by which they shall be filled, according to his judgment and sound discretion.

That this meeting have every confidence in the integrity and patriotism of Mr. Smith, and no wish or intention to violate any law of their own government.

On motion of R. T. Lyttle, Esq., a central committee was appointed to correspond with the New Orleans committee, in relation to Texas. The committee was formed by the appointment of Dr. Daniel Drake, William M. Corry, Nathaniel Seaman, Colonel Charles Hales, and Israel Ludlow.<sup>1</sup>

Under date of March 16, 1836, Mr. William Bryan, general agent for Texas at New Orleans, reported to the Governor and Council of Texas the arrival at that place of "two iron field pieces":

I have rec'd a letter from Cincinnati Ohio, and with it two Iron field pieces complete excepting harness, presented by the Citizens of Cincinnati, (through W M Corry Chn of Texas Committee Edward Woodruff and Pulaski Smith Esquires) to the government of Texas. I have in the name of the government acknowledged their receipt, and presented them with your thanks for their noble and acceptable donation. . . .

"The cannon were manufactured, mounted, supplied with shot at the foundry of Messrs. Greenwood and Webb," of Cincinnati.<sup>2</sup> They were dispatched by Mr. Bryan to Brazoria. "To this point General Houston sent twice for them; but the want of means of transportation, the wretched condition of the roads, and ultimately the proximity of the enemy, made it hazardous to forward them by that route. They were then shipped by Colonel A. Hus-

<sup>1</sup>*Cincinnati Evening Post* quoted by the *Texean and Emigrants' Guide* (Nacogdoches), December 19, 1835.

<sup>2</sup>Yoakum, *History of Texas*, II, 123.

ton, the quartermaster-general, on board the schooner *Pennsylvania*<sup>3</sup> to Galveston Island, and thence to Harrisburg. At this place horses were pressed to haul them, and they were started on the 9th of April, under care of Captain Smith, to the army."<sup>4</sup> They reached the army at Groce's on the 11th.<sup>5</sup> They were the only cannon in possession of Houston's army, and their receipt produced quite a sensation. One of the soldiers described them as "two beautiful, new, iron field pieces."<sup>6</sup>

President Burnet sent an official letter of thanks to Daniel Drake, M. D., William Corry, Pulaski Smith, Nathan Leamans, and W. Chase, dated Velasco, July 22, 1836:

GENTLEMEN: The two beautiful pieces of "Hollow-ware," lately presented to us, through your agency, by the citizens of Cincinnati, as a free-will offering to the cause of human liberty, were received very opportunely, and have become conspicuous in our struggle for independence. Their first effective operations were in the memorable field of San Jacinto, where they contributed greatly to the achievement of a victory not often paralleled in the annals of war. . . .

To you gentlemen, and to the citizens of Cincinnati, who have manifested so generous a sympathy in our cause, I beg leave to tender the warmest thanks of a people who are contending for their liberties and their lives, against a numerous nation of semi-savages, whose cruelty is equalled only by their want of spirit and of military prowess.

Should our enemy have the temerity to renew his attempt to subjugate our delightful country, the voices of the *twin sisters* of Cincinnati<sup>7</sup> will yet send their reverberations beyond the Rio

<sup>3</sup>Mr. Ben C. Stuart makes the statement upon information obtained from Luke A. Falvel, captain of the schooner *Flash*, that it was his vessel that carried the cannon from Velasco to Morgan's Point, and that the sloop *Ohio* conveyed them from Morgan's Point to Harrisburg. (*Galveston News*, November 14, 1909.)

<sup>4</sup>Yoakum, *History of Texas*, II, 123.

<sup>5</sup>THE QUARTERLY, IV, 249.

<sup>6</sup>Kuykendall, *Ibid.*, 302. In a letter, written by Henry Vallette, Cincinnati, May 31, 1836, to David G. Burnet, he says, "We sent you two iron 4 Pounders last March," but Houston and Rusk, in their reports of the battle of San Jacinto, each calls them six-pounders.

<sup>7</sup>This is the earliest use of the term "Twin Sisters of Cincinnati" that has come to my notice. In his speech in the United States Senate, February 28, 1859, Sam Houston told of the receipt, while encamped on the Brazos, of "two small six-pounders, presented by the magnanimity of the people of Cincinnati, and subsequently called the "Twin Sisters." (THE

Grande, and carry unusual terror into many a Mexican hamlet. Texas has no desire to extend her conquests beyond her own natural and appropriate limits, but if the war must be prosecuted against us, after abundant evidence of its futility has been exhibited to the enemy and to the world, other land than our own must sustain a portion of its ravages.

The period of active service of the "Twin Sisters" apparently ends here. Early in 1840, together with the other ordnance stores, they were removed from Houston to Austin.<sup>8</sup> It is probable that they were stationed so as to be ready for use against the Indians, but no evidence has been found of actual service. On the other hand, the anniversary of the battle of San Jacinto was ushered in on April 21, 1841, by "a colloquial interchange of the same twin-sisters, that spoke with so much effect on that day five years ago."<sup>9</sup> And later in the same year, when President Houston was inaugurated, "the very moment that General Houston kissed the Book, as a seal to his oath to support, protect and defend the Constitution, one of the 'Twin Sisters' of San Jacinto thundered forth as it were a loud shout of joy! The effect was electrical upon the multitudes, as it was unanticipated and was followed by bursts of applause."<sup>10</sup>

Then followed annexation, consummated in such haste, leaving the terms so vague, that there was no end of dissatisfaction and dispute. The war with Mexico delayed the carrying out of some of the provisions. The fact that General Taylor had little love for Texas, made them all the more critical of his course. The editor of the *State Gazette* complained:

The Government is removing the public property from the depot at Galveston to Baton Rouge. It will not be long before Gen. Taylor will have stripped our State of every vestige of our revolutionary trophies. The United States have got our naval vessels

QUARTERLY, IV, 320.) The tendency to adorn a tale has given rise to a story which relates that they were called "Twin Sisters" in honor of two little girls, the twin daughters of a Dr. Rice, a physician in the Texas navy, who stood sponsors at the presentation. (*Houston Post*, August 30, 1909.)

<sup>8</sup>"Report of the Colonel of Ordnance" in *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, Fifth Congress, 169-70.

<sup>9</sup>*Texas Centinel* (Austin), April 29, 1841.

<sup>10</sup>*The Red-Lander*, December 30, 1841.

and armaments, and will probably leave us to pay for them. They are now removing from our limits the very guns that were placed on the battery at Galveston by the Republic of Texas to defend the harbor. Can any one tell where the "Twin Sisters," which did such good service on the field of San Jacinto, are now to be found? Was it too much to leave them on the soil which they had defended? Have we not a generous, a just, even a paternal Government! It leaves us utterly exposed on all sides—our towns on the coast to an attack by sea and our settlements on the frontiers to Indian foray and depredation. But this is only a part of the price of our confiding patriotism. The end is not yet.<sup>11</sup>

The removal of the "Twin Sisters" to Baton Rouge would in all probability have been the end of them but for the fact that the events of 1861 again turned attention to military preparedness. George Williamson, commissioner for Louisiana to Texas, arrived in Texas during the interval between the first and second sessions of the Secession Convention, when matters were in charge of the Committee on Public Safety. John C. Robertson, chairman of this committee, on February 14 addressed Mr. Williamson as follows:

The Committee on Public Safety regret to have to make known to your State through yourself the unfortunate condition of Texas as to arms for her people. Should coercion be the policy of the incoming administration at Washington, we hope to bring into the field as many strong arms and brave hearts as our Southern sisters, but in this crisis we must ask them to lend us whatever spare arms they have. The committee beg to know of you what assurances you can give to Texas in behalf of your gallant State on this subject. Especially, sir, would we ask of you your individual efforts in our behalf to secure for us the two pieces of ordnance, well known in the history of Texas as the "Twin Sisters." We are informed that they are now in the hands of the State of Louisiana, having been lately taken from the Federal government.<sup>12</sup>

Mr. Williamson reported on March 13 his efforts to recover the "Twin Sisters" in the following letter to O. M. Roberts:

On the 16th ultimo, while in your State, I was requested by the Committee of Public Safety to use my "individual efforts"

<sup>11</sup>*State Gazette* (Austin), October 20, 1849.

<sup>12</sup>*Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas*, 308.

to procure arms for the State of Texas and also to procure the two pieces of ordnance used at the battle of San Jacinto, known as the "Twin Sisters" . . .

Immediately on my return I repaired to the State Capital, and after considerable inquiry found that the "Twin Sisters" had been sold several years ago to a foundry in Baton Rouge as *old iron*. Upon applying at the foundry I found one of the guns in a very neglected condition; and ascertained that the other was in the possession of a gentleman living in the Parish of Iberville. Having learned these facts, I addressed a letter to the Legislature, recommending that the guns be purchased by the State of Louisiana, put in good order, be well mounted, and presented to the State of Texas.<sup>13</sup>

The steps taken by the Louisiana Legislature in response to Mr. Williamson's letter are told by H. W. Allen, a member of the House of Representatives, in the following letter to Mr. Williamson:

Action was immediately taken on your letter, a committee<sup>14</sup> appointed to procure the guns, mount the same in a handsome manner, with all the appurtenances for actual service. The sum of seven hundred dollars is appropriated to carry out the above, and the committee will have the pleasure of forwarding the guns in good order in ten or fifteen days.<sup>15</sup>

In an editorial correspondence for the *State Gazette* of April 20, 1861, the editor gives an account of his trip from New Orleans to Galveston; he says:

We brought with us over the Gulf the two cannon used so effectually on the 21st of April, 1836, at San Jacinto. I hope to see them properly taken charge of by the State authorities, and preserved as proud testimonials of the gallantry of the men of our revolution.<sup>16</sup>

The Ninth Legislature adopted a joint resolution, expressing appreciation of this mark of friendship on the part of Louisiana.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>14</sup>The committee was composed of Messrs. Allen, Austin and Brusle. (*Southern Intelligencer* (Austin), March 13, 1861, quoting the proceedings of the Louisiana Legislature.)

<sup>15</sup>*Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas*, 207.

<sup>16</sup>*State Gazette*, April 20, 1861.

Under date of November 30, 1863, Major A. G. Dickinson, commander of the Post at San Antonio, reported to S. T. Fountaine, chief of artillery and ordnance, district of Texas, that "the 'Twin Sisters' I am informed, are at or in camp in the vicinity of Austin. They are in a deplorable condition, and I am fearful could not be used."<sup>17</sup>

This is the last official notice of the "Twin Sisters" written before trace of them was lost. Much has since been written concerning the disposition made of them and their present whereabouts, but in every case where examination has been practicable its erroneous character has been proved. During the years 1909 and 1910, Mr. W. C. Day, State Superintendent of Public Buildings and Grounds, made a careful investigation of every clue he could find. He was at that time engaged in certain improvements at the San Jacinto battle ground. The results of his endeavors were almost entirely negative, the only bit of substantial information added being that found by Mr. Ben C. Stuart, set forth below. Mr. Day summed up the matter as follows:

I have received nearly one hundred letters, placing them [the "Twin Sisters"] in nearly as many different places, extending from Washington, D. C., to Santa Fé, N. M. Some of them are made of brass and some of them of iron, with all sorts of inscriptions. . . .

They have been buried in whole and in part; have been dumped into the Gulf of Mexico; resurrected from the Colorado River; discovered in some Louisiana Bayou; have been found in the Navy Yard at Washington, and have petrified on the plains of New Mexico.<sup>18</sup>

Mr. Ben C. Stuart, a veteran newspaper man, then a resident of Hitchcock, Texas, now of Beaumont, sent a brief sketch of the "Twin Sisters" to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. As a result of this article, Mr. M. A. Sweetman, of Circleville, Ohio, wrote to

<sup>17</sup>*Official records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, I, 26, Part 2, p. 459.

<sup>18</sup>*Houston Post*, June 6, 1910. The following references are given for the curious who may wish to go into this matter: *Austin Statesman*, October 3, 1909; *Dallas News*, June 9 and 24, and November 19, 1909; *Galveston News*, April 16 and 23, and May 1, 1893; *Houston Chronicle*, November 10, 14, and 24, 1915; *Houston Post*, August 11, 15, 21, 22, and 30, 1909; *The Story of Corpus Christi*, 111.



Mr. Stuart, informing him of the facts concerning the "Twin Sisters" in his possession. The letter from which extracts are here quoted is dated October 20, 1909:

In the latter part of the month of July, 1865, the One Hundred and Fourteenth Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry, of which I was then a member, was quartered in the Kennedy Building, in the City of Houston, Texas. . . . On some vacant ground, immediately north and back of the Kennedy Building, on July 30, 1865,<sup>19</sup> I saw a number of old cannon. . . . Among these guns were two short and very common-looking iron 24-pounders, entirely dismounted, and with the following inscription, in small capitals, engraved deeply on each:

<p style="text-align: center;">Presented to The Republic of Texas by Maj. Gen. T. J. Chambers</p>
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On brass plates, attached to the wooden carriages of each of two other guns, iron six-pounders, much more symmetrical in shape and appearance, was the following, the first line in old English:<sup>20</sup>

<p style="text-align: center;">"Twin Sisters" This gun was used with terrible effect at the Battle of San Jacinto. Presented to the State of Texas by the State of Louisiana, March 4, 1861.</p>
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<p style="text-align: right;">Henry W. Allen, Charles C. Brusle, William G. Austin, Committee of Presentation.</p>
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<sup>19</sup>In a subsequent letter to Mr. Day, Mr. Sweetman said, "The inscriptions were copied in a small book which I still have in my possession, and the date mentioned is July 30, 1865." (*Houston Post*, June 6, 1910.)

<sup>20</sup>*Galveston News*, November 14, 1909. In his letter to Mr. Day, Mr. Sweetman said, "The inscription on the 'Twin Sisters' as published in the *News* contains all the words, though the lines are not divided exactly as they appeared on the plate, and as I copied them in my book." (*Houston Post*, June 6, 1910.)